

VZCZCXRO4777
PP RUEHDBU RUEHPW RUEHSL
DE RUEHNO #0492/01 3031331
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 301331Z OCT 09
FM USMISSION USNATO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3548
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 0855
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RUEHNO/USDELMC BRUSSELS BE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 USNATO 000492

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/30/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [AF](#) [PK](#) [RS](#)

SUBJECT: RUSSIA SAYS IT FACES FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS
PROVIDING AID TO AFGHANISTAN

Classified By: Political Advisor Kelly Degnan for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Russian MFA Second Asia Department Deputy Director Ali Mustafabeli told Deputy to the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (D/SRAP) Paul Jones on October 21 that Moscow was considering additional aid to Afghanistan, but was limited by the difficult financial situation Russia faced. The GOR was ready to provide weapons and engage in infrastructure reconstruction projects, and looked to the U.S. and others to help cover the costs. Mustafabeli could not fully explain the disparity between Russia's political commitment to expand cooperation in Afghanistan and the level of practical cooperation on the ground. Russia was concerned that electoral irregularities had further diminished Afghans' faith in their government, and advised the U.S. and international community to provide greater political support to Karzai, while remaining in the background. Russia hoped that Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) would become more effective against extremists, while power relationships between Kabul and tribal leaders needed to be addressed. Mustafabeli expressed Russian concern over the threat from Afghan narcotics, and asked that the U.S. and NATO consider cooperating with the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) on counter-narcotics efforts. End summary.

Russian Assistance to Afghanistan

¶2. (C) During an October 21 bilateral meeting held in advance of a NATO-Russia Council meeting on Afghanistan and Pakistan, D/SRAP Paul Jones acknowledged to Mustafabeli previous Russian assistance to Afghanistan and asked what more the GOR could provide. Mustafabeli explained that Russia was doing its best in the "framework of our financial possibilities," leading Jones to respond that for a country of Russia's stature, the aid under discussion was not large. He pressed for Russian in-kind contributions, such as the 50,000 AK-47s recently requested by Afghan Interior Minister Atmar. Mustafabeli responded that this request was still under consideration, and asked why the U.S. would not purchase Russian weapons for Afghanistan when Moscow was offering them at low cost.

¶3. (C) Mustafabeli said that Russia was ready to work on Afghan infrastructure projects, and might cover some costs, but there was the question of who would pay for the rest.

Jones explained the difficulty in asking Congress to appropriate funds for Russian firms to work in Afghanistan. He and Mustafabeli agreed that the bilateral discussion on potential Russian assistance to Afghanistan had been going in circles. Possible ways forward include political level meetings on our practical cooperation, such as when Ambassador Holbrooke visits Moscow, and interagency expert level meetings that could expand and clarify specific areas for cooperation.

Afghan Election and Governance

¶4. (C) Mustafabeli lamented that the hopes placed upon the recent Afghan election had been ruined by the scale of irregularities, which had discredited the electoral process, and perhaps the presidency itself. He stressed the need to cultivate among Afghans a positive image of the central government, and advised that the international community have Karzai publicly announce new initiatives, even if these were actually directed by the U.S. and other outside contributors.

Jones responded that no one had expected the election to be perfect, but that the scale of irregularities were such that they could not be ignored. He explained that the U.S. agreed with Mustafabeli's observations, and had advised Karzai to focus on local governance and delivering basic services to the population.

¶5. (C) Mustafabeli stressed the need for the international community to help the central government develop a

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sustainable capacity to combat the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. He posited, however, that the issue went deeper than simply defeating extremists, and was a question of settling the division of power between the central government, the provinces, and tribal leaders. Mustafabeli warned that despite progress overcoming these divisions, the fight would start again the day after international forces left the country. Jones made clear to Mustafabeli that the U.S. did not want permanent bases in Afghanistan, but remained committed to achieving our core goal. This required building up ANSF quickly and effectively, as well as working with Afghanistan's neighbors.

Counter-Narcotics

¶6. (C) Mustafabeli said that Moscow looked forward to SRAP Holbrooke's visit, and stressed that it would be politically important for him to meet with Russian drug enforcement officials to demonstrate U.S. commitment to counter-narcotics efforts in Afghanistan. He suggested that Ambassador Holbrooke also meet with members of the Russian Duma, where rumors circulated that Afghan drug trafficking was purposely aimed at Russia. Mustafabeli raised the issue of the U.S. and NATO cooperating with the CSTO's counter-narcotics effort, Operation Canal, explaining that this was merely practical, and not political, cooperation on a matter of concern to Russia and the Central Asian states.

¶7. (U) This cable was cleared by D/SRAP Jones.
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